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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 003234

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: LATEST AOUN STATEMENT THREATENING,
CONFRONTATIONAL

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Section 1.4 (d)
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1. (C) MP and Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) Leader General Michel Aoun held a press conference in his Rabieh headquarters October 4 with a delegation of FPM area coordinators. Aoun continued his attack (following up on statements made in the FPM "Right of Return" conference September 30 and to Al-Diyar on the same day) against the GOL and the March 14-aligned parliamentary majority. Aoun's statement touched familiar themes but edged closer to threatening language, in particular with attacks on U.S. foreign policy and UNIFIL.

TAKING ORDERS FROM EMBASSIES

2. (C) Aoun, echoing Hassan Nasrallah's attack on the frequency of the Ambassador's meetings with PM Siniora, accused GOL leaders of taking their instructions from embassies in Beirut. "When some say that General Aoun and his colleagues in the FPM and the Change and Reform parliamentary bloc have become Syrians and Iranians, I not only doubt them, but also doubt their instructors and the embassies they follow, as well as their policies and credibility." Leaving no doubt that he meant that March 14 was following the U.S. Embassy, Aoun added, "what model are the Americans presenting to us now, Iraq or Gaza?"

THREAT AGAINST UNIFIL

3. (C) Aoun appeared to justify potential attacks on UNIFIL when he questioned UNIFIL's rules of engagement. "Why can't there be any conflict in the air to stop the aerial aggression on Lebanon...are actions prohibited on the Lebanese territories from one side?" he asked, suggesting that UNIFIL's role amounted to preventing the Lebanese from defending themselves against Israeli attacks and airspace violations.

POLITICS AND CORRUPTION

4. (C) Repeating the frequent FPM complaint that the Ta'if Agreement has not been fully implemented, to the detriment of Lebanon's Christians, Aoun accused March 14 of implementing a "bilateral Sunni-Shiite version, and the Christians remain outside of this version." Aoun accused March 14 leaders of

corruption past and present. He said, "we will not only criticize the corruption but also fight it."

FPM PLANS

15. (C) FPM will commemorate Aoun's October 13, 1989 expulsion from Baabda at the hands of the Syrian military on October 15 of this year. While Aoun did not go into specifics in the speech, the FPM is widely expected to mount a massive rally in an open space next to Beirut's City Mall. The spot lies just a few miles from the Embassy along the main traffic artery linking the compound to central Beirut, which may present difficulties for movement of Embassy personnel on that day. The point of this rally, many people suspect, is to remind people that Aoun stood against Syria in 1989 -- and thus he can't be as pro-Syrian now as the March 14 supporters (many of whom cheered on Syria's forced expulsion of Aoun) claim.

16. (C) A school is next door to the mall, and the FPM has already begun what is clearly a well-financed back-to-school program at the school, including large orange banners and free school materials. (Note: Such expenditures are hardly in keeping with our FPM contacts' insistence that they have no foreign resources, and that the FPM is a party run on the volunteered time and money of its own officers and activists. End Note.)

WAR OF WORDS

17. (C) Aoun's latest speech, his third public statement in a
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week, is a further escalation in the March 14/March 8 war of words. In addition to PM Siniora and Walid Jumblatt's preemptive strike on Aoun's September 30 conference, the Council of Maronite Bishops released its monthly statement the same day as Aoun's speech. The Bishops criticized calls for a national unity government which "hides intentions to foil the formation of an international tribunal in the assassination case of ex-PM Hariri and all other assassinations that followed." The Bishops continued that Lebanese political actors "should not serve at the whim of foreign partisans." The previous Bishops' statement from September had subtly criticized Aoun for his presidential ambition; this month's statement clearly had darker accusations for Aoun and his March 8 allies.
FELTMAN